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BRIEFER ARTICLES

EDUARD STRASBURGER¹

(BORN FEBRUARY 1, 1844; DIED MAY 19, 1912)

(WITH TWO PORTRAITS)

In the death of STRASBURGER, professor of botany in the University of Bonn, science has lost one of its greatest investigators. His publications, extending over nearly half a century, naturally give the impression that he was a very old man, but such was not the case, for he was only in his sixty-ninth year, and was still actively engaged in research and teaching, when the end came suddenly through an attack of heart disease.



STRASBURGER was a native of Russian Poland, and began his education at Warsaw, studying later at Bonn and at Jena. He traveled extensively in Europe, and in 1873, with HAECKEL, he visited Egypt and the Red Sea, but most of his vacations were spent in Italy, on the Riviera. His wife died several years ago, but his children survive him. He was

devoted to his family, was proud of his children, and during the long period while Mrs. STRASBURGER was an invalid, he always found time to accompany her in her daily walk through the beautiful gardens of the old Poppelsdorfer Schloss, once the palace of the Electors of Cologne, but now serving as the botanical laboratory and home of the professor of botany. With others also he was kindly and easy to approach, so that

¹ An account of STRASBURGER's laboratory and work, written by Professor J. E. HUMPHREY, was published in this journal eighteen years ago (BOT. GAZ. 19: 401-405, with portrait. 1894).

his students found in him not only a teacher, but also a sympathetic friend, interested in their researches, but also interested in their welfare after leaving his laboratory.

His first publications dealt with the embryology of gymnosperms, then with the more minute details of the life-history of angiosperms. In these researches he showed a profound grasp of the fundamentals of comparative morphology and gradually turned more and more to the study of the cell, until his laboratory became recognized as the most important cytological center in the world.

He was a remarkable lecturer. Although a master artist, he seldom used the chalk, but presented his subject in such vivid word pictures that any further illustration seemed unnecessary. His usual lectures to students covered morphology from the algae to the flowering plants, and every Friday he gave a lecture, open to the public, upon some botanical subject of popular interest.

In the research laboratory he visited every student every day, and always had some helpful suggestion or criticism, but the student would learn on the first day that STRASBURGER had no time to waste. This daily round, in which he might visit as many as eight investigators, seldom occupied more than half an hour, but occasionally, after the usual laboratory hours or on Sundays, he would come into the laboratory, when only one or two students were present, and talk familiarly on various subjects for an hour or more. He seemed particularly attached to his American students. It was my privilege to know him rather intimately at Bonn, and during the ten years which have elapsed since my return, a constant correspondence has continued the inspiration and helpfulness received while at his laboratory. Some quotations from this correspondence will be of more interest than anything else one could write. In a letter of June 29, 1910, he says: "I prize very highly the kindly recogni-



tion of my scientific efforts by my American colleagues. It is a great pleasure to note the tremendous advances of our science in the United States, and to be able to say to myself that in some measure I have been responsible for it."

Of the greatest interest is a letter of October 2, 1908, written in response to a request for some data to be used in an historical seminar at the University of Chicago.

LIEBER HERR KOLLEGE:

You overestimate my contributions! I myself am inclined to believe that I have often failed and only in part attained the scientific ideal which hovered before me. However, in the investigation of life everything is still in flux, the solution of the problems lies in the distant future, and the best that can be said of any one of us is that he was a necessary stage along the way to knowledge. What gratifies me particularly is that in my lecture-room and laboratory I have inspired competent, gifted men of high ideals to strive for the same goal which hovers before me, and that my work shall continue to live in theirs.

Since you wish to know it, I was born on February 1, 1844. I studied first at Bonn, where I gained technical skill under HERMANN SCHACHT, and at the same time found a great stimulus in the lectures of JULIUS SACHS, who at that time was a teacher in the Poppelsdorf Agricultural Academy. The sudden death of SCHACHT made me decide to go to Jena to PRINGSHEIM, who had met me in his visits to SCHACHT, and who invited me to become his assistant. The critical mind of PRINGSHEIM reacted beneficially upon me, while my association with ERNST HAECKEL soon made me enthusiastic over the great problem presented by CHARLES DARWIN.

My acquaintance with my ten years older teacher soon became friendship, and I have to thank ERNST HAECKEL that two years after my promotion in Jena, when PRINGSHEIM retired, I was called to his place. I was then 25 years old. I was never closely associated with HOFMEISTER. Unfortunately, during the latter part of his life, HOFMEISTER became very sensitive and was angry with me because in 1869 in my work on *Befruchtung bei den Coniferen* I sought to prove that the "corpuscula" do not correspond to the embryo sacs of angiosperms, but are archegonia. HANSTEIN came to Bonn as professor after I had already settled in Jena. In 1887 I came to Bonn as HANSTEIN's successor. I had been teaching in Jena for twelve years.

With hearty greeting, your very devoted,

E. STRASBURGER

In his correspondence with his colleagues, STRASBURGER never used a typewriter, feeling that a typewritten letter indicated haste and lack of respect. The following is a reproduction, slightly reduced, of a noble paragraph from the above letter.

-Was mich besonders
freut, ist aber dass ich,
in meinem Vorlesungsraum und
Institut, tüchtige und begab-
te, ideal angelegte Männer
für die hohen Ziele die wir
selber vorschwebten, zu beges-
tern wusste und dass mei-
ne geistige Arbeit in ih-
rer Arbeit fortleben wird

STRASBURGER felt keenly the attack made upon him on account of his paper on graft hybrids. He felt it beneath his dignity to reply, but in a letter of January 6, 1910, he says: "I had the position to defend which I have held in regard to the rôle of the nucleus in fertilization and heredity, and which WINKLER threatened to overthrow. That alone was responsible for my paper in the *Berichte der deutschen botanischen Gesellschaft*."

For some time he had known that his health was failing, but he had continued to work, and his publications show that he was still in his prime and that advancing years had only brought their experience and power without weakening his initiative or enthusiasm in research. At the time of his death, he was deeply interested in the problem of the determination of sex and had investigations under way bearing upon this important subject, but was being delayed by another piece of work. In a letter of March 5, 1911, he writes:

Unfortunately, I have not got to my microscopic work this winter. A year ago I saw myself necessitated to take part in a scientific publication of pretentious scope, bearing the name *Kultur der Gegenwart*, which is to present in accessible form the whole field of science. The plan may be good in itself, but I have often deplored that I allowed myself to undertake the work and that I must devote to it, rather than to my own research, the few years of scientific activity which still remain for me. Besides, I have not felt well this winter,

and in spite of the advice of my physician, have had to work hard. Day after tomorrow I start for the Riviera and shall see whether I may not recuperate a little.

At the present time a *Festschrift* is under way to commemorate STRASBURGER's seventieth birthday. A complete account of his life and work will doubtless be published, but a brief notice is appropriate at this time, and the words from his own pen will be appreciated by his numerous pupils and friends. The photograph taken in his regalia, while he was president of the University of Bonn, was given with the injunction that it must not be shown in Germany nor published anywhere during his lifetime. The other photograph was taken in 1892.

Ich grüße Sie herzlich
 und wünsche Ihnen Freude
 und Glück in Hand und
 Fuß. E. Strasburger

—CHARLES J. CHAMBERLAIN, *The University of Chicago*